

The Rt. Rev. Stephen London, Ordination Homily, June 29, 2022, Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul

Good evening, Diocese of Edmonton! I am so glad to be able to be with you all tonight. Thank you for being here. God's Holy Spirit fills this space. This is a beautiful occasion as we come to ask God to ordain Arthur as a priest in this church, and to ordain Lisa as a deacon in this church. You are both very courageous to put yourselves forward for public ministry, but God has laid this calling on your heart, and so you are here. And I am also glad that we can gather as this is the first full gathering that we have been able to have in the diocese since Covid. And I know there are a few here who have this day for their ordination anniversary. Today is a good sign that we are moving into the next chapter in the life of our diocese and following where God is calling us.

Where is God calling us as a diocese? What is going to be the context of your ministry as you go from this service into your new calling? As you well know, discernment of God's call is not always clear. Rarely, do we get a sign that says, **do this next**, as much as we must hope that to be the case. True discernment takes patience... the ability to listen... self-examination... a good understanding of context... a deep rooting of our life in God... prayer, serious prayer... immersion in the Holy Scriptures... humility. We are doing this process as a diocese, and part of our discernment will be the next gathering of the diocese when we gather for Synod in October, we will pray together and talk together.

The theme of synod, as I hope you have heard by now, is a meditation on the literal meaning of the word synod: walking together. We are calling it Together on the Way. This is meant to capture the image of the church is not as a static institution, but as a movement. As the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, puts it, we are the Anglican branch of the Jesus movement. He writes, "The Jesus Movement is the ongoing community of people who center their lives on Jesus and following him into loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, each other and creation. Together, we follow Jesus as we love God with our whole heart, soul and mind and love our neighbors as ourselves, and restore each other and all of creation to unity with God in Christ." I think Bishop Curry has this exactly right. We are the Jesus Movement. Tonight, we are ordaining two people into ministry. However, these services are also always a reminder that all of us has a ministry.

As we walk together, all of us have a part to play in God's economy of salvation. All of us, every single person here tonight and in our churches has a calling and a vocation; a special way to live out the great commandments of loving God and loving neighbours that can only be lived out by you, because of your unique personality, combination of gifts and circumstances. And you will spend your life growing into your unique calling and being a blessing to the world. The world needs you. We need you to be a sign of God's love in a broken and hurting world, to be an agent of healing, goodness, beauty and kindness.

There is no doubt we are in challenging times as a church. Numbers are down, finances are tight. The question keeps coming back. What are we to do? There is a growing discerned consensus that our central focus needs to be on helping people to own and live out their calling. Encouraging people to be on fire with their faith and to shine goodness. In other words, discipleship, being followers of Jesus Christ. But not alone, together. Walking together

Discipleship is the great adventure. Whenever we walk out the front door, we just don't know how God is going to use us. We can plan our day (and most days we should), but something unplanned always happens. I have never had a day that has gone perfectly to plan. We have to be ready. We don't want to miss it. What is God doing and we can be a part of it. There is nothing I find more interesting than discipleship.

It is a whole God-soaked way of living.
It is about living fully and deeply;
it is about maturity;
it is about making a difference;
it is about having purpose;
it is about self discovery;
it is about discovering whole worlds outside the doors of your house you didn't know existed;
it is about discovering a whole spiritual world;
it is about growing close to the creator of all things.
It is about Jesus.
It is all about love.

And this is the point of tonight. The Gospel is about love; it is about right relationships. The Gospel is not about finding peace in a hard broken world; it is the transformation of the broken world through grace. And we get to be a part of that, that is our calling; that is our calling. The Gospel is the fire alarm of a coming new world. In Jesus Christ, God has acted to make all things new, pointing to a vision of a world recreated in the love and goodness of God.

The Jesus movement is about walking together in the way of love. But it is a hard path to want. And the church has gotten this really wrong in the past. The church throughout history has done some beautiful things, but we have also sinned terribly. The history of the church throughout history has a litany of wars, division and violence. On this land, we never entered into right relationship with the First Peoples of this land, but took the land, tried to destroy their language and culture. Now we are in a time of repentance and trying to establish a new right relationship.

The way of love is not about cheap grace, but costly grace. It has to be about profound transformation. We can see what this looks like in the examples of the two saints we are celebrating today. Saints Peter and Paul.

Take St. Paul. He was the great early persecutor of the church. Here was a person whose pedigree was faultless. He tells us that he took great pride in his heritage. He could trace his ancestry through the tribe of Benjamin all the way back. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. When it came to his religious observance, he was faultless. He did everything just so. When heresy reared its ugly head, Paul cut it off. There were probably very few people as perfect as Paul. That is not what Jesus wanted, and he transformed Paul. And it was a mess. He lost all his perfections; he lost his old connections. He struggled to hold his new churches together; they argued and bickered. He was stabbed in the back; he had health issues. And yet... did he regret it? No, he had learned how to love. He learned the way of love. He is the one who wrote... the greatest of these is love. He is the one who wrote... "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard

as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus” Paul found a new way, the way of love.

So did St. Peter. Peter was a man marked by fear and uncertainty. Peter was chosen by Jesus to be a leader, but he never quite seemed to get it right. And then at the great moment of testing, when his master was being arrested, Peter ran... and not only did he run, but he denied Christ three times. And when he realised that he wept. I am guessing that he felt there was no going back on this; no chance of redemption. Until, as we read in the Gospel this evening, the resurrected Jesus is having breakfast with him. And Jesus asks Peter, do you love me? Three times Peter said, ‘yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Each time Jesus said to him, ‘feed my sheep.’ Jesus restored him in love and called him to be a messenger of love. Peter found a new way, the way of love.

Arthur and Lisa, I am very grateful that you have said, ‘yes,’ to this call to be a part of what God is doing in Jesus Christ. Part of the imagery of the ordination service is that this isn’t about you by yourself, or me by myself. But that all of us have gifts to bring and offer to the whole. Thank you for bringing your gifts. May God bless you in your ministry.